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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001012

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [ELAB](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NLC PLANS GENERAL STRIKE TO BEGIN JUNE 9

REF: ABUJA 1009

Classified By: CDA Rick L. Roberts. Reasons 1.5 (B & D).

[11.](#) (SBU) Summary: The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) has announced a 21-day general strike to begin June 9 against the latest increase in the price of gasoline. Less than twelve hours until its deadline, numerous organizations are supporting the strike even as efforts are under way to resolve the dispute. The NLC has said that there is "no going back" from what it terms the "mother of all strikes" except reducing the price of gasoline, while the GON says the strike would be "threatening Nigeria's nascent democracy." The strike may peter out the first or second day, but if it takes hold the most likely course would be to start small and grow larger. The unions have reportedly threatened to cut oil production/exports under the strike, but that and threats to shut down air traffic may only be rhetoric. End Summary.

ALL IN FAVOR?

[12.](#) (SBU) The NLC announced a 21-day general strike beginning tomorrow, June 9, to protest against higher fuel prices. Its leader, Adams Oshiomhole, promised this would be the "mother of all strikes," saying the only way to avert the action is for the GON to roll back the price of gasoline. The NLC has announced several strikes in the past year, only for each one to be averted due to last-minute "compromises." The July 2003 strike actually took place, but then was suspended when the GON agreed to hold the price of gasoline to 34 Naira per liter. The GON has since raised the ceiling three times and now gasoline is selling for over 50 Naira per liter in Abuja and Lagos (130 Naira=1 USD).

[13.](#) (C) Dissent within labor's ranks is causing confusion on the strike. Most NLC leaders no longer trust Oshiomhole, who is said to have taken 100 million Naira from the GON to call off the last strike. The NLC has barred him from direct participation in any negotiation with the GON, and this ban appears to have garnered support from among other civil and political groups. An NLC organizer told poloff that plans are in place and the strike will commence "as scheduled." The Lagos State NLC Chairman said measures have been taken to ensure the strike in Lagos is complete, and anyone wishing to leave Lagos should do so before midnight tonight, June 8.

[14.](#) (U) Many unions not directly affiliated with the NLC have offered their support, including the National Union of Banks, Insurance and Financial Institutions Employees (NUBIFIE), the Association of Senior Staff of Banks, Insurance and Financial Institutions (ASSIBIFI), the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW). Their members have been directed to clear all roads by midnight June 8 and remain at home during the strike. The Trade Union Congress (TUC) and the Congress of Free Trade Unions (CFTU) also gave the GON a seven-day ultimatum to rescind the price hike when they announced support for the strike.

[15.](#) (U) The opposition Conference of Nigerian Political Parties (CNPP) and Constitutional Rights Project (CRP) all threw their support behind the strike, bringing in heavyweight political actors such as Balarabe Musa, Gani Fawehinmi, Wole Soyinka, Muhammadu Buhari and Chukwuemeka Ojukwu. The All Nigerian People's Party (ANPP), saying that three weeks was not enough time to change the GON, called for the strike to last six months.

[16.](#) (U) The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) has announced that it supports the strike, to identify with the "suffering of Nigerians." The National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) announced that it supported the strike and that it would defend strikers against "saboteurs" who would disrupt the strike. (Note: It is also quite likely that a successful strike would be enforced by "area boys," gangs for hire like the Oodua Peoples Congress. End Note.) The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) have also announced support for the strike.

ON THE OTHER SIDE

[17.](#) (U) President Obasanjo, on his way to the G8 Sea Island Summit, told reporters that the GON would hold talks with and engage dialogue in an effort to resolve the issue. However,

he tempered his nice words with a certain amount of vitriolic spice, "Where it is needed, we will dialogue; when necessary, we will explain our actions." While calling on Nigerians to remain peaceful, he threatened to use "all available force" to stop the strike.

18. (U) Striking a similar chord, Vice President Atiku Abubakar called the NLC strike a threat to Nigeria's "nascent democracy." National Chairman of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) Audu Ogbeh earlier strongly opposed the strike, pleading that it's not too late for dialogue, but termed the strike announcement "a declaration of war" by the NLC. Ogbeh warned the NLC not to "challenge Obasanjo, who was a military man and will respond with force."

19. (SBU) The Crude Oil and Products Traders Association of Nigeria (COPTAN) and the Petroleum Pricing and Marketing Committee (PPMC) pleaded with the NLC to allow the fuel price deregulation policy, claiming it would provide a long-term benefit for the populace. (NOTE: The chairman of the PPMC, Rasheed Gbadamosi, is himself a petroleum marketer who controls a portion of the country's imports and owns over 100 tanker trucks personally. END NOTE.) Talks between union representatives and other interested parties continue under various auspices, including the Senate and the governors.

POTENTIAL INTERNATIONAL IMPACT

10. (U) The National Union of Air Transport Employees (NUATE) has written to foreign embassies asking their countries' airlines not to fly into Nigerian airspace during the strike. According to NUATE, any foreign airline operating into the country within the period will be doing so at its own risk, as its air traffic controllers will not be on duty to clear them. The GON's Nigerian Airspace Management Agency (NAMA), however, insists that control towers at all airports will be adequately staffed.

11. (C) The two oil unions, NUPENG in the NLC and PENGASSEN in the TUC, have both reportedly threatened that the strike will include crude oil production/exporting. It remains to be seen if this and the NUATE threat go beyond rhetoric.

COMMENT

12. (C) COMMENT: The NLC leadership, at levels under Oshiomhole, are determined and there is widespread anger among Nigerians that could become support for the strike. Skepticism over Oshiomhole's previous performances is understandably high, however, and the GON had little difficulty squashing the CNPP's threatened "mass action" in May. It is unclear whether the NLC strike will take or die out quickly, but it is likely that the morning of June 9 will see empty streets in Abuja. Nigerians may choose to remain at home June 9, either in support of the strike or in fear for their safety if they venture out. If the strike survives day one, more people will be likely to join by June 10, but it is unclear which services will suffer. Post EAC has met to make appropriate preparations (reftel).

ROBERTS